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TAGS: PREL PHUM CH BM SN

SUBJECT: CHINA AND SINGAPORE SUPPORT AN "INCLUSIVE PROCESS"; ASEM DIALOGUE REVEALS COMMON GROUND ON BURMA

REF: BEIJING 6895

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson, Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Singapore and China expressed support for a more inclusive national reconciliation process in Burma during the October 26 visit of Singapore FM George Yeo to China, though neither Yeo nor Chinese FM Yang Jiechi articulated the elements of that process, according to MFA Asia Department Burma Division Deputy Director Liang Jianjun and a Singapore Embassy contact. Both governments will continue to support UN Special Envoy Gambari's "good offices" mission to Burma. Separately, the ASEM Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) discussion on Burma reportedly revealed common ground rather than division between the EU and ASEAN. End summary.

¶2. (C) MFA Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam Division Deputy Director Liang Jianjun and an Embassy of Singapore contact November 1 separately discussed with poloff the October 26 visit to China of Singapore FM George Yeo. As part of his visit to India, Japan and China, FM Yeo met with Chinese FM Yang Jiechi to secure support for ASEAN efforts on Burma. Both Deputy Director Liang and our Singapore Embassy contact confirmed that beyond seeking out China's views on the situation in Burma, FM Yeo made no specific requests to China.

Avoid another Iraq

¶3. (C) Deputy Director Liang said FM Yeo, expressing concerns about Burma both "as a neighbor and as chair of ASEAN," described Burma as "a very difficult country" with religious and ethnic problems that could only be resolved through a national reconciliation process. Liang said FM Yeo stated that the people of Myanmar do not want to become "another Iraq" and that the military must be included in any national reconciliation process.

¶4. (C) FM Yeo observed that Singapore originally did not want to accept Burma into ASEAN, but agreed only under pressure from other members. After the recent turmoil, "some members" want to expel Burma from ASEAN, but in this instance, Singapore believes that Burma is "part of the ASEAN family" and "has to face the reality" of the situation within the context of ASEAN.

¶5. (C) According to Liang, both sides affirmed support for the UN Special Envoy Gambari's "good offices" mission in Burma and agreed that sanctions are not helpful. FM Yeo observed that Burma is intent on cooperating with the UN

rather than ASEAN, highlighting Gambari's success in gaining the confidence of both the Burmese military leadership and Aung San Suu Kyi, while previous ASEAN envoys have made little progress with the regime.

National reconciliation important, but undefined

¶6. (C) Both sides reportedly affirmed the need for a more inclusive national reconciliation process, though the elements of that process were not specified. When asked, Liang commented that the process was "very complicated" and included both the regime's "imperfect" seven-step "roadmap" to democracy and additional initiatives with ethnic groups. Our Singapore Embassy contact admitted uncertainty over exactly what was meant by "a more inclusive national reconciliation process." (Note: Asked about MFA International Organizations Department UN Division Deputy Director Sun Xiaobo's statements of October 30 that China hopes Burma can "speed up the democratic process" (reftel), Liang stated that China hopes Burma can "speed up the national reconciliation process" rather than the "democratic" process.)

Upcoming Summits and Burma

¶7. (C) FM Yeo told the Chinese that Burma may be discussed at the East Asia Summit November 21, or at least ASEAN will meet to exchange views on the way forward. Liang said FM Yeo confirmed that newly-appointed Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein will attend the ASEAN summit and that ASEAN should seek channels to provide humanitarian assistance to Burma. Liang said the Chinese encouraged ASEAN to play "a more positive

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and constructive role" in resolving the Burma issue. Liang commented that currently ASEAN can only agree that sanctions are inappropriate but that the group has been unable to formulate positive measures to address the situation. According to Liang, speculative discussions of troika dialogues, core groups and similar mechanisms highlight the lack of unity in ASEAN.

ASEM SOM produces EU-ASEAN consensus on Burma

¶8. (C) EU China Mission Counselor for Political Affairs Alexander McLachlan (strictly protect) November 1 told us ASEAN participant representatives discussed Burma (also present) at the October 29-30 ASEM Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Guilin, China. Building on the October 2 UN Human Rights Council resolution on Burma, EU officials plan to pursue measures in the Third Committee of UNGA to guarantee unfettered access for the Red Cross (ICRC) in Burma, a full cessation of hostilities with anti-government ethnic groups and an inclusive national reconciliation process. McLachlan commented that unlike previous SOMs, where the EU and ASEAN would divide into opposing camps over Burma, Singapore, as ASEAN chair, supported the direction of the EU measures, except for the imposition of sanctions. For its part, China, as chair of the meeting, did not comment on Burma, but neither did it move to limit discussion.

¶9. (C) McLachlan echoed the above assessment that beyond opposing sanctions, ASEAN has no common vision for movement on Burma. McLachlan, too, noted ASEAN's lack of specifics for the "inclusive national reconciliation process," but commented that at least this reveals ASEAN does not consider the regime's seven-step "roadmap" the sole way forward.

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